

PRESS RELEASE

Congressman John Conyers, Jr.

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Conyers on Sniper Case:
“Much Improvement Needed in Our Gun Safety Laws”

In reaction to information acquired by investigators in the course of the Washington, D.C. sniper case, John Conyers, Jr., Ranking Member of the House Judiciary Committee and Dean of the Congressional Black Caucus issued the following statement:

“This case has made it abundantly clear that much improvement is needed in our gun safety laws. I hope in the coming months Congress will take a close look at the following:

The Assault Weapons Ban expires in 2004 and must be renewed and strengthened.

In the 1994 Assault Weapons ban law, Congress banned a number of weapons. After the ban, a number of irresponsible companies made minor and cosmetic adjustments to these banned weapons to circumvent the law and continued to sell assault weapons. One such company, Bushmaster, manufactured “post ban clones” – the Bushmaster .223 rifle, used in this case. We need to plug the loopholes in the assault weapons ban that have continued to allow the sale of these weapons.

We need to take a close look at how these weapons are marketed by irresponsible gun manufacturers. I have asked the FTC to investigate whether military assault weapons are being inappropriately marketed to civilians. The catalog for Bushmaster (the manufacturer of this gun) advertises that the gun is “The Best – by a long shot” seemingly appealing to a sniper culture. The rifle’s brand number is the “XM15,” which is meant to draw parallels to the military’s M-15 rifle.

A national system of ballistics fingerprinting is needed. In 1999, Congresswoman Carolyn McCarthy and I introduced the “Enforce Act,” which included a number of pro-gun enforcement provisions, including a national system of ballistics fingerprinting. Under this system, before a gun is sold, one round would be fired and catalogued so that the unique fingerprint of the gun could be recorded. If the gun was later used in a crime, bullets could be traced to the gun and to the owner of the gun. Critics say that this system is too subject to tampering by criminals, but the sniper case showed that ballistics tracing works (authorities used the unique ballistics fingerprint to tie the sniper crimes together)

We need to close the gun show loophole. While someone like John Muhammed would not have been allowed to buy a gun at a gun store because he would fail the background check (he had a domestic violence restraining order), he could walk into a gun show and buy the same gun no questions asked. There is no background check required from an unlicensed dealer at a gun show. We need to have the same background checks at gun stores as gun shows.”

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